NATIONAL DEFENSE UNIVERSITY

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THE 1997 U. S. NSS: STRATEGY OR WISH LIST?

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The Clinton 1997 National Security Strategy (NSS) claims to establish a blueprint for U S National Security for the 21st century Although it attempts to break the Cold War strategic paradigm of containment, it falls short of providing an effective construct for executing strategy in the "new world disorder "[1] The White House product reads more like a corporate annual report than a document with strategic vision There are inconsistencies within the document's strategic logic that are likely to cause confusion and hamper implementation

To be effective, a strategy must follow a framework and present a logic that enables it to "hang together " This coordination and calculation of *means* and *ends* is dependent upon a strategic vision that is clear and consistent A coherent national security strategy should contain clear definitions and prioritization of goals, interests, and objectives It should develop a plan for employing all the tools of statecraft in accordance with those prioritized interests and objectives Finally, an integrated NSS should be based upon well-reasoned assumptions and consideration of its ramifications on other nations' cultures and security concerns [2]

One cannot examine the 1997 NSS without first addressing the context in which it is developed The nature of the democratic system poses unique difficulties for strategists They do not plan in a vacuum Modern day technologies deluge them with information, commentaries and criticisms The U S political system and government bureaucracy further convolute the strategy development process, infusing campaign promises and "pork barrel" political issues Private corporations and lobbyists also elbow their way into the process Issues become blurred and, ultimately, the NSS runs the risk of becoming a marketing tool--a consensus document that

[1] Terry L Deibel, "Strategies Before Containment," *International Security* 16,4 (Spring 1992) 80
[2] These points are extracted from COL Reed's introductory lecture to Course 5601 on 19 August 1997

has lost its punch with respect to strategic interests and objectives Unfortunately, the 1997 NSS has fallen prey to this phenomenon It attempts to please everyone

Interests, Goals, or Objectives?

What *are* the U S vital national interests? It seems that every conceivable interest is included in the NSS, however, it is difficult to sort through the rhetoric and distill those interests which are truly vital In addressing national interests, the NSS uses a plethora of terms There are "security interests" in Russia, "overarching interests" in China, "enduring interests" in the Middle East and "principal security concerns" in the Western Hemisphere Because these terms are used interchangeably, the NSS overlooks a key step in the strategy development process—it fails to clearly delineate and prioritize national interests As a result, it is incumbent upon the reader to determine their relative importance

Among the many phrases used to describe interests, perhaps "core objectives" and "fundamental needs" come closest to identifying our vital national interests The chart below illustrates this point

CORE OBJECTIVES	FUNDAMENTAL NEEDS
Provide security with effective diplomacy and military forces that are ready to fight and win	Protect the lives and safety of Americans
Bolster economic prosperity	Maintain sovereignty of U S with its values, institutions and territory intact
Promote democracy abroad	Ensure prosperity of the nation and its people

Although we are not privy to the assumptions and issues that surfaced during the development of the NSS, economic prosperity seems to be our most important vital interest Despite an insistence that democracy is the fundamental underpinning of the NSS, the theme of

economic prosperity permeates the document, both as a vital interest and in the pervasive use of the economic tools of statecraft to achieve desired ends With more than 75 references to economic prosperity and stability, a more apt title for the NSS might be "Economics 'R' US " It appears we are willing to subordinate the ideals of democracy and human rights to a drive for free markets and economic prosperity One has only to look at our China policy and foreign aid reduction initiatives in developing Third World countries to substantiate this assessment

Failure to Establish Resourcing Priorities

The 1997 NSS lists six strategic priorities to advance our core national objectives, but makes no effort to outline how resources will be allocated in support of those priorities It proposes the Administration's "wish list" (i e , desirable objectives) but fails to assess the relative costs/feasibility of the objectives One is led to believe that the U S still has the capability to "do it all " The NSS hedges on its commitment to resourcing its objectives by using rhetoric such as multilateral operations, alliances, and burden sharing It never makes the tough choices

The lack of prioritization of interests and objectives leads to the danger of over-committing tools of statecraft, with urgent, non-vital objectives siphoning resources from vital, long-term objectives In short, by managing our resources in an ad hoc manner, we could mortgage our ability to meet future needs U S operations in Somalia serve as an example of resource expenditure for no apparent gain

In reality, there is significant evidence which demonstrates that the tools of U S statecraft, while substantial, are inadequate to accomplish all the initiatives outlined in the 1997 NSS There are insufficient means to support the ends For example, studies conducted by independent organizations indicate that it is doubtful the U S military could fight and win

another operation similar to Desert Storm, let alone two major regional conflicts (MRCs) at opposite ends of the globe Funds for more than 27 major deployments during the past 18 months have been diverted from Service training and maintenance funds, causing dwindling morale and readiness statistics [3] With further manpower and fiscal reductions programmed for the defense budget, the Administration will be forced to rely on other tools, which may not demonstrate the same degree of resolve, to accomplish its objectives

The economic tools of statecraft are expected to shoulder the major burden--perhaps too great a load--in support of the 1997 NSS Where military force may have been the primary tool of choice early in the Clinton Administration, economic tools clearly have assumed preeminence The 1997 NSS touts them as a panacea for international as well as domestic concerns An example is the overuse of bilateral trade agreements (in spite of our stated commitment to ensure free and open markets) to forward political and domestic objectives These agreements could back us into a corner at the international trade bargaining table and prevent us from making long term progress

Finally, the NSS states that it must strengthen the diplomatic tools required to meet future security challenges. Failure to place a resource priority on diplomacy has resulted in a significant reduction in the State Department budget and the elimination of the USIA as a separate entity with a viable mission of promoting democracy abroad [4]

It appears that CNN may continue to play a significant role in influencing priorities for U S foreign policy in the absence of clearly prioritized and properly resourced objectives

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[3] Steven Metz, "Why Aren't Americans Better at Strategy?" *Military Review* 78 (January-February 1997) 187
[4] Laurence D Wohlers. "America's Public Diplomacy Deficit," *NWC Student Paper* (1997) 3

Flawed Assumptions—Ineffective Strategy

In general, the 1997 NSS does a fairly decent job of projecting end states with its goal of economic prosperity It has not fared as well with its goal to promote democracy Perhaps the reason can be traced to a flawed assumption in the NSS—that the desire of other nations for economic prosperity will override their cultural concerns. Because of this assumption, the NSS blinds itself to potential adverse ramifications of promoting democracy abroad It fails to acknowledge a different perspective of democracy projection because it has aligned democracy with economic prosperity

Democracy projection is risky business Other nations may not tolerate a U S rekindling of the "white man's burden" or, more appropriately, "Manifest Destiny " Acceptance of democracy may involve radical changes in lifestyle, government and/or culture The costs may be too great for nations to accept The U S could be perceived as imperialistic and/or opportunistic--promoting democracy only in those countries where it has an economic or political interest The dilemma for the U S , the proponent of democracy, would then be to justify why it intervened in Somalia and Haiti, yet not in Liberia The consequences of value projection may cost our nation the very things it is attempting to gain (i e , markets and alliances)

Objective assessment, early in the process, of the ramifications of promoting the "American Way" would have alerted planners to the possibility of a rebuff of democracy, and a more culturally sensitive, low-key approach could have been developed. Perhaps a better tactic would have been to present the U S as a shining example of political and economic freedom (as

in John Winthrop's "City on a Hill"), allowing other nations to adopt those aspects of democracy that fit their particular culture and traditions [5]

The 1997 NSS is well-intentioned One must acknowledge that it is difficult to develop strategy during a period of transition where the focus of the American people is clearly on domestic concerns Authors and critics are quick to lament the absence of strategy, but they offer little in the way of recommendations The NSS can be credited for pushing beyond isolationist impulses and advocating an engagement policy It may be argued that the 1997 NSS is the best it can be at this point in time given the domestic pressures and the democratic bureaucracy However, strategy should not be based upon the current state of political affairs, nor the whims of various interest groups, but should be developed using a logical framework that incorporates vision in achieving the vital interests of the nation The 1997 NSS fails to clearly define interests and set priorities Without a clear delineation of the *ends*, the means become overused and overextended The result is the absence of a coherent strategy where non-vital objectives take priority over vital objectives without considering the consequence to the national interest

[5] Terry L Deibel, "Strategies Before Containment," *International Security* 16,4 (Spring 1992) 97

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